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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[18 March 1998]

GE.98-11281 (E)

The child's rights to health and life

1. Multilateral embargoes (those against Iraq and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) and unilateral measures (those against Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) have proven, by their long presence on the international scene, how damaging they are to the most disadvantaged and weakest categories of the world's population and yet have not resolved the political disputes from which they originated.

2. A full foreign trade embargo is a means of deliberately plunging the economy concerned into a state of "controlled torpor" and among its direct consequences is that it makes respect of the fundamental right to health impossible. Access to care becomes an exceptional privilege from which the bulk of the population is excluded. Even the Cuban health system, long one of the world's most advanced and the South's best developed, has deteriorated.

3. Many Libyans, especially children, have died for want of swift access to care. The toll has been heaviest - in the hundreds of thousands, according to UNICEF - in Iraq, where the children are paying the price of an embargo that has been in force since 1991, with no end in sight.

4. Embargoes decreed by a single State (or group of States) are mere manifestations of "private justice" and, as such, completely illegal. Embargoes decreed by the Security Council, on the other hand, have a semblance of legality. The doctrinal controversy surrounding them highlights the extreme weakness of the thesis of the advocates of such "counter-measures". And the fact of the matter is that through them a United Nations body whose mission under the Charter is to keep the peace, and to do so principally by negotiation and conciliation, has become an instrument for violating the rights to health and life of thousands of children.

5. The United Nations cannot allow itself to become through so much as one of its organs even an indirect tool of programmed slaughter. The rights of the child cannot be treated as if they were less important than the settlement of oil-related political disputes.

6. The Commission on Human Rights would, therefore, be justified in declaring that there is incompatibility between collective economic and military sanctions and the protection of the fundamental rights of the child, and in alerting the other United Nations bodies to that fact.